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Current Opinion

St. Paul in Athens

Greek influence upon the Christianity of the first century is a moot-question the answer to which would be furnished substantially by a statement of Greek influences upon the life and thought of the great apostle to the Gentiles. For such an influence we are prepared beforehand since Tarsus was his home and Greek his native language. It is, therefore, largely a question of the extent of this influence. The opinion of the veteran Greek scholar, the late Professor Curtius, will be especially interesting. It is available in a translation in the November *Expositor* of an article written some years ago on St. Paul in Athens, and published in the *Transactions of the Berlin Academy of Sciences*. The writer considers the famous scene described in Acts, chap. 17, as most important historically and inherently trustworthy. The Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in the slang of the day call Paul a "spermológos," a transient "picker-up" and peddler of new religious teaching, a religious Sophist. Yet they place him in the midst of the market committee of the Areopagus (not on the famous hill and not for trial) that he may set forth more fully to themselves and to the listening crowd of the market-place his new doctrine.

Now it is in Paul's skilful handling of this situation that Professor Curtius sees striking evidence of his acquaintance with Greek religious history, life, and thought—specifically in his recognition of and appeal to the fundamental religious monotheism of the early Greek view of God, in his recognition of God's revelation to the Gentiles by the light of nature and human consciousness, in his endeavor to understand historically the religious life of the heathen world. In all these, as in many other touches in this scene, he sees evidence that Paul's thought has traveled beyond the educational limits of his own people.

Impressed by this evidence of contact with Greek life and thought, Professor Curtius runs rapidly through Paul's own writings and from the philological standpoint finds abundant further traces of Greek modes of thought. Some of the instances which he cites seem hardly valid as evidence of strictly Greek influence on Paul but may rather be viewed as evidence of Professor Curtius' own extensive and detailed acquaintance with Greek life and literature. But the total array is interesting and forcible.

Professor Curtius concludes with a statement of the mutual influence

of Greeks and Semites. The use of the Greek language itself implies a stream of Greek influence affecting the Jews even before Paul. Paul himself did not learn Greek artificially, but thought and felt as a Greek as his ready use of it implies. It remains an important task of the history of moral culture to estimate and recognize this Greek influence. On the other hand the Semites influenced the Greeks in their early commercial life and in their philosophy, many of the leading Stoics being Semites originally. But Paul was the first Semite to remain truly a Jew and yet bring the rich religious possession of a liberal Judaism in the form of Christianity to fill the great gap in the waning of Greek education.

Marriage Problems at Corinth (I Cor., chap. 7, etc.)

The topic of marriage undoubtedly had a prominent place in the Corinthians' letter to Paul. Commentators, however, have chiefly centered their attention on ascetic tendencies there. Breaking away from this course, Sir William Ramsay defends a neglected thesis, namely, that at Corinth a desire prevailed to force marriage on all as a duty. Rev. Professor Robert Mackintosh (*Expositor*, October, 1907, pp. 349 f.) discovers two Corinthian parties holding the diametrically opposed views just mentioned.

It is undoubtedly true that Paul exalts celibacy above marriage. And even for Protestants celibacy is ridiculous and a failure only under pure biological standards. Jesus, interpreted spiritually (Matt. 19:12), corroborates Paul's dictum.

For marriage Paul's reasons are: (1) "the teaching of Jesus forbidding divorce; (2) if wholesale celibacy is enacted, there will ensue a series of ghastly moral breakdowns, worse than marriage . . . ; (3) there is the great principle of abiding in the condition in which God called one."

In the analysis, vss. 1-7 do not outline "the general problem of sex relation," but advise those already married. They unequivocally warn against the shattering of sacred family ties.

Vss. 8, 9 apply to celibates who accepted Christ. "Loyalty to the condition in which grace found one is the determining duty." The same rule applies to a Christian Jew (vs. 18), to a Christian Gentile (vs. 18), a Christian slave (vs. 21), and a Christian freedman (vs. 23).

The third class to receive admonition are the Christians in "mixed marriages," i. e., with a pagan; a group certainly large in a community recently evangelized. "The principle of loyalty to condition" still holds. The Christless partner may come to believe. Yet opposition must not be raised to a divorce desired by the non-believer.

Vss. 25-40 decide for the virgin section. The young man "is to keep single if he can; marry if he must." But the daughter, as in all oriental life, is at the disposal of her parents. Even here, where marriage alone emancipates, Paul kindly but firmly admonishes, that the maiden remain a virgin, for the "Day of the Lord" is at hand. Paul well realized that "a life full of interests is full of cares; a heart filled with love must be filled with tears."

Today our eschatology is changed and under Christian protection "romantic love" has entered the world never to be displaced without entailing serious consequences. Paul never attained this altitude of ideal wedlock in love. Besides, experience teaches unmistakably that the Christian matron is not necessarily inferior to the virgin in piety. At present the Madonna sits enthroned.

Many modern currents, however, affirm that marriage is servitude; men and women must be equal in opportunity. Paul asserted that men could not become Jewish Christians or Christian slaves. Ought he not to have obliterated the distinction between male and female, as he once blurs it (Gal. 3:28)? Against such an obliteration Paul revolts with his whole being. "He speaks (I Cor. 11:2-16) like one feeling about for arguments to support an instinct and to justify a foregone conclusion." The church as a whole obeys Paul's instinct. Ought it not rather to follow Pauline logic to its conclusion and analogy (e. g., abolition of slavery)? Does prejudice enthrall or principle reign? The question demands an answer.

New Material for Exegetical Study of the New Testament

No exegesis which is not distinctly objective in its method can at present hope to win recognition. Nowadays Bible students want to know just what the New Testament writers said, not what some theological interpreter is able to make them say. Within recent years a large amount of new material has become available for this study. It consists of inscriptions and papyri written in the common Greek, as spoken throughout the Roman world during the general period to which the New Testament writings belong. A knowledge of the existence of these documents is not a new thing, but their use as an aid to the interpretation of the New Testament literature is a matter of comparatively recent date.

Deissmann, a German scholar who has occasionally written for English periodicals, and two of whose books are available in English (*Bible Studies*, 1901, and *New Light on the New Testament*, 1907), is the pioneer in this field. He has been contributing to the *Expositor* a series of articles on the philology of the Greek Bible; and the fourth of these, dealing with

New Testament philology, appeared in the issue for January, 1908. It emphasized what he has often stated before, namely, the language of the New Testament is not an isolated type but is thoroughly representative of the Greek of everyday life. Its variations from classical usage are, therefore, not to be explained as specifically "biblical," as used to be the fashion; for many of its supposed inventions and Septuagint imitations are now found to have been current in the common speech. Thayer assigns about 550 words to the class "biblical," but Deissmann thinks that the Christian writers cannot now be credited with more than fifty new formations, and even this number is likely to be reduced by further investigation. He does not deny to the Christians the possession of new religious thought, but he holds that they expressed it in the language of their day, turning to practical account whenever possible the religious notions of that time. Thus he sees how, in a study of the contemporary literature, new light is to be shed upon rare New Testament words, upon obscure idioms, and upon ideas that are as yet but imperfectly or incorrectly interpreted. One can see at a glance that there is immediate need of a new New Testament lexicon. This, according to report, is at present being prepared by Deissmann. In the meantime some help may be obtained from a series of articles, prepared jointly by J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, just begun in the same number of the *Expositor*, entitled "Lexical Notes from the Papyri." This is an attempt to set forth alphabetically such words from the papyri and inscriptions as illustrate uncommon or obscure New Testament words. These articles will supplement three of a similar character which appeared in the same periodical about four years ago. It should also be noted that Moulton's recent *Grammar of New Testament Greek* is an attempt to shed light, from these new sources, upon seeming irregularities of syntax, while Deissmann has confined himself principally to the lexical side of the study.

Fact and Fancy in Christian Theology

Many persons seem to be of the opinion that theology is not, in the strict sense of the term, a scientific study. Fancy rather than fact is supposed to be the dominant element in its constitution; its premises seem vague and uncertain, and its deductions seem to be wanting in strictly logical qualities. How, it is asked, can a man of intelligence and earnestness become a professional theologian, thus devoting his energy to that which has no foundation in reality? This feeling is not confined to the ignorant, nor to the irreligious, but prevails in many quarters among men of learning as well as among persons of practical piety; some ridicule the

theologian, some ignore him, and others who are more sympathetic pity him. In view of this situation Professor Francis G. Peabody writes in the new *Harvard Theological Review* (January, 1908) upon "The Call to Theology;" and Professor William Adams Brown contributes to the current January number of the *Hibbert Journal* an article upon "The Reasonableness of Christian Faith."

Professor Peabody sees, in the signs of the times, a strong demand for a return to theology, notwithstanding the inclination, at present so widely manifest, to sidetrack the subject. He regards a revival of theological study necessary in order to save the ministry from "intellectual frugality." In this age of scientific accuracy the church needs leaders in whom "intellectual honesty—precision, reserve of statement, the weighing of words"—is as conspicuous as in men of science or men of affairs. Personal piety and ability to administer the affairs of a parish, though commendable accomplishments, can never prove a substitute for intellectual power. Without leaders who are thinkers in the scientific sense, the church must give up its claim to leadership under the conditions of the present age. Men will think about religion, if they are thinking men; therefore let religious thinking be done with precision, with honesty, with a passion for truth, to the end that theology may not be of the "molluscous" type but "vertebrated," and so stand respected for its scientific method.

But has theology any subject-matter worthy of the scientific thinkers' attention? Peabody makes no plea for a revival of old theological controversies, nor does he expound the present content of theology save in the most general way, it is "the message of the Timeless" which is to be translated into the dialect of the present. "The traditional, external, and formal theology of the scribes speaks in a language which the present age does not understand, but the theology of Jesus Christ has the perennial authority of spiritual insight and habitual communion with the Eternal."

Professor Brown is more specific in attempting to set forth the objective content of theological thinking. Granting that theology can no longer rely upon the dogma of an infallible revelation, he undertakes to find a substitute sufficiently strong to furnish a rational basis for Christian faith. A few sentences of his own will make his problem evident:

The real question which we need to settle is not whether religion has some organ of knowledge distinct from science . . . but whether the experience which religion brings and the ideals by which it is inspired bring us into contact with objects which are capable of sufficiently exact description, and whose effects upon life may be tested over a wide enough area, to justify their description in scientific terms. The contention of those who believe in the possibility of a

scientific theology is that this is the case, and the belief of those who call themselves Christians is that the character of these objects, when so described, will be found to agree in substance with the content of the historic Christian faith.

Pursuing this line of argument the writer notes, first, that religious phenomena permit of scientific treatment. The study of the history of religion has shown the permanency of its types and made possible some formulation of its laws. This study has already gone far enough to show that religion is as much a part of the world of fact as is any other realm of human experience. These general data furnish a means of testing the reasonableness of Christianity; that is, the Christian faith, if it makes any claims to scientific certainty, must be able to satisfy the historically attested religious needs of humanity. This it is found to do, not by means of its creeds for they may vary with the individuality of its adherents, but by the thoroughness with which it satisfies the spiritual needs of men. Since its essential content is found ideally set forth in the life of a historic person, the reasonableness of the Christian faith is all the more evident and this definiteness gives additional scientific value. The legitimacy of development in Christianity is recognized provided it is development and not perversion.

These two papers are very suggestive in calling to mind afresh the emphatic claims which theology has a right to make to a position among modern sciences. For some time past it has been taking heed to its method in the interests of scholarly exactness, and it has also drawn unto itself from various sources new materials. At present it reckons among its resources the facts of human experience as attested by the religious history of the race, the facts of Christian history rediscovered by thoroughly scientific methods of investigation, and the testimony of centuries of the Christian consciousness. What other science can show a richer capital?